

Lesson Activities

- [Activity 1. Objects Tell Stories](#)
- [Activity 2. Tea as Political Action: Creating a Dramatic Presentation](#)

Activity 1. Objects Tell Stories

In this activity, students learn how to interpret one or more historical objects (tea pots) as a way to become acquainted with the material world of the revolutionary-era colonists. They will also learn how those objects contributed to the way that the political mobilization against Great Britain was understood and developed. Finally, they will learn how teapots were only one item—although a very important item—in the world of goods that helped colonists fashion new identities. They will create a visual story with these historical objects by annotating teapots and writing labels for their exhibits on the “fashions and manufactures of Great Britain.”

1. On the first day, the teacher should model the interpretation of artifacts by looking at one of the key objects in the new Atlantic consumer culture—a teapot. In a whole class setting, model the interpretation of this teapot with the words “Stamp Act Repeal’d” on it (from [Elizabeth Murray Project](#), a link on the EDSITEment-reviewed website the [National Park Service](#)). Teachers can also include the interpretation of several teapots, with the words “Stamp Act Repeal’d” on it from [Curating an Exhibit](#), a link on the EDSITEment-reviewed site, [Learner.org](#). Teachers may wish to contrast this item with **two other teapots from the Smithsonian Museum of American History**.) The Curating site provides a model for understanding a teapot in the context of a political event. Materials on artifact analysis in Background Information for the Teacher, especially those provided on the Smithsonian site, may be helpful in demonstrating how one goes about analyzing a historical artifact.

Modeling object interpretation:

- Ask students what is most noticeable about the teapot?
- Ask students to describe what they see in detail, such as the teapot’s shape, color, decoration, design, and text
- Ask students to make some inferences about who might have made one of these teapots? Was it British-made for the American market? Why would someone have bought one?
- What was the significance of putting “No Stamp Act” on a teapot rather than a broadside? Who saw it? Where was it displayed? What could be the significance of the tea parties for building up resistance by the colonists? The teapot became part of the tea ritual and tea parties where like-minded colonists consult with each other.
- What was the meaning of buying a British teapot to express dissatisfaction with British policies towards the colonists? The “No Stamp Act” teapot built up colonial solidarity through the consumer’s act of drinking tea. This was akin to how consumer goods, many of them British, brought together often quite distinct colonists.
- How does a teapot differ from an item of clothing as a possession? Who might own a teapot?

2. For homework have students read the following two items:

- [The Stamp Act Crisis](#) from EDSITEment’s [Digital History](#); a background piece on political protest and the American Revolution.
- [Franklin’s 1765 Testimony before Parliament](#)

Following up on the Franklin text, ask students to think about why Americans bought British goods. Why did they not buy American teapots?

3. Divide the class into three groups—**High**, **Middling**, and **Low**. Ask students to look at the teapot for their respective group and have them describe what they see and offer an initial annotation of their assigned teapot.

- **Low:** [Earthenware Tea Set](#) is imported and cheaper in cost, linked from the [Metropolitan Museum](#).
 - **Middling:** [Choates Porcelain Tea Pot](#), from EDSITEment’s [Smithsonian National Museum of American History](#) is imported and more expensive in cost. (To see the teapot place mouse pointer on arrows until you see the teapot and click on the image.)
 - **High:** John Singleton Copley’s portrait of [Paul Revere Portrait with Silver Tea Pot](#), 1768 (American made, expensive; [no. 2-A in the Picturing America portfolio](#)), from Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Listen to the audio clip by Malcolm Rodgers the director of BMFA on the significance of the Sons of Liberty bowl and the portrait. The [section](#) of the [Teachers Resource Book](#) devoted to this portrait will also be useful for teachers, as will the [Neoclassical pot](#) that Revere designed in 1796 on [Picturing America poster no. 2-B](#).
4. Looking at Material Culture: Have the students look at the following additional primary sources for their group to compare teapots with other consumer goods. Students should annotate their teapots with comparison observations based on these sources.

Low

- [Earthenware Tea Set](#) is imported and cheaper in cost.
- [“His little woman at home drank tea twice a day,” Alexander Hamilton, *Itinerarium*, at American Memory](#) Scottish traveler’s critique of consumption by the “lower sort” – p.1 of [Worksheets for Activity 1](#) packet.
- [Advertisement about a runaway slave](#) from *Boston Weekly Post-Boy* October 2, 1749 by Joseph Barnard for the description of an enslaved person’s clothing, a link on [American Centuries](#). Not everyone owned a teapot or set of saucers. By their clothing colonists at all social levels participated in the world of goods. Click on “show text” button in lower right of screen to see text of ad or click on Activity button and then roll-over ad, to see it enlarged.

Middling

- [Choate’s Porcelain Tea Pot](#) is imported and more expensive in cost. (To see the teapot place mouse pointer on arrows until you see the teapot and click on the image.) From [Within These Walls](#), an online exhibit about families that live in a Massachusetts house—the Choates, American colonists, 1757–1772, (choose object thumbnails for explanation and larger version—teapot and other objects), [Smithsonian National Museum of American History](#)
- Benjamin Franklin, Excerpt from *The London Chronicle*, May 12, 1759 – p. 2 of [Worksheets for Activity 1](#)
- [Chest of Drawers, 1775. American Centuries](#). Chests became increasingly popular possessions for storing clothes in the eighteenth century.

High

- [John Singleton Copley, Portrait of Paul Revere](#), 1768 from the Boston Museum of Fine Art website. The portraitist depicts Paul Revere, famous Boston silversmith and patriot, with several significant items: his mahogany table, white shirt, and impressive teapot. Listen to the audio clip by Malcolm Rodgers the director of BMFA on the significance of the Sons of Liberty bowl and the portrait. Note this image is [no. 2-A in the Picturing America portfolio](#). The [section](#) of the [Teachers Resource Book](#) devoted to this portrait will also be useful for teachers, as will the [Neoclassical pot](#) that Revere designed in 1796 on [Picturing America poster no. 2-B](#).
- [32-Piece Tea Service, Worcester, England, 1765-1777](#) a link on EDSITEment-reviewed [Digital History](#). A full tea spread with accompanying text describing the ritual of taking tea.
- [John Adams, Diary Entry, January 16, 1776](#), upon visit to Nicholas Boylston’s House. [Massachusetts Historical Society](#), a link on [Digital History](#) – p.2 of [Worksheets for Activity 1](#)

Annotation: Students can use the source or some part of it (if a text) or also refer to the text/object in their annotation. By linking several annotations to their teapot they should have a central object with several annotation boxes around it that tell a story about what the teapot means in the context of other objects and texts from the age of refinement.

Label: Students should write a general label for their story: one to two paragraphs on what the teapot and other goods mean for an understanding of the Age of Refinement and the era of the American Revolution. These labels should be similar to the general wall labels used in a museum exhibition. In a few sentences they should make clear what “links” their teapot to their other objects and texts? In writing their descriptions, they should consider these general questions:

- Why was the teapot made?
- Why was it owned?
- How was it used?
- What other sorts of objects might be associated with a teapot?
- What sort of political meaning could a teapot have?
- How does a teapot differ from clothing and other objects?

5. Students should share their visually-annotated teapots with each other and discuss in a whole group what sorts of stories objects can tell. What are some of the differences between sources that are artifacts and those that are texts? Can you “read” an artifact in the same way that you can read a text document?

Activity 2. Tea as Political Action: Creating a Dramatic Presentation

In this activity, students situate tea and imported British manufactures squarely within the context of the struggle with the government of Britain. The previous lesson made clear how consumer goods helped the colonists in the process of defining their identities. Students are divided into 4 groups: **A**, **B**, **C**, and **D**; these groups read documents that roughly move through the years of the revolutionary crisis from 1766 to 1775 (group D spans the decade). This struggle over tea and importation led the Continental Congress in 1774 to adopt a national economic strategy of non-importation and non-consumption. Over that decade the colonists also moved from political debates to political and military action.

Each team will create part of a four-part drama about the relationship of American dependence on British manufactures to the economic politics of the American Revolution.

1. Download and make copies of the sources provided below for use in the classroom. Divide the class into 4 groups. Give each group a selection of documents and the prompt for their group provided in this packet, [Worksheets for Activity 2](#). A student can have primary responsibility for one or two documents/objects. Have students in each group read the documents and objects assigned to their group and take notes about key concepts, arguments, representations, and actions.
2. Have students discuss their sources with each other in their group. Have each student familiarize other students in his or her group with the source s/he has studied.
3. Ask the groups to develop skits or short dramatic presentations on the assigned theme. They should link all the sources together in a story that fleshes out that theme. The skits should focus on key issues and involve key figures featured in the documents and objects. Students might find the [Timeline of the Revolution](#) at the [PBS Liberty](#) website useful for seeing the progression of events during revolutionary crisis.
4. In the class discussion students should address the progression from group A to D—from taxing the tea to choosing sides in the conflict.

Group A. Taxing as Tea and other British Merchandise

P.1 of [Worksheets for Activity 2](#)

Questions to consider for this group: What do the colonists see as signs of danger? What sort of arguments against Parliament’s authority do the colonists make? What sorts of actions regarding taxation of goods do they propose?

- [The Repeal or the Funeral Procession of Miss Americ-Stamp](#): A satiric cartoon commemorating repeal of the Stamp Act, c. 1766, a link on EDSITEment-reviewed [History Matters](#).
- [“Whereas the Duty on tea remains unrepealed,”](#) advertisement about the repeal of the Townshend Duties, New York, June 12, 1770, on [American Memory](#).

- [Poplicola, “To the Worthy Inhabitants of New-York,” Broadside, 1773](#), on [American Memory](#).
- [The Tea Act of 1773](#), a link from [Teaching American History](#).

Group B. Refusing to Take the Tea

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Questions for this group to consider: How would refusing to consume tea change British policies? What are some of the arguments for associations? Arguments against?

- [George Washington to George Mason](#), letter, 1769, on [American Memory](#).
- [“A Society of Patriotic Ladies,”](#) (1775), Engraving, on [History Matters](#).
- [The Articles of Association](#), October 20, 1774, on [The Avalon Project](#).

Group C. Sources: Destroying the Tea

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Questions for this group to consider: Why was the tea destroyed? What would that destruction accomplish? How do issues of gender and region affect the political debate?

- [The Tea-Tax-Tempest, \(1783\)](#), on [Political Cartoons of the Lilly Library](#) a link from [History Matters](#).
- [Account of the Boston Tea Party](#), *Boston Gazette*, December, 20, 1773, [American Memory](#).

- [Tea Destroyed by Indians \(the tea is sunk\)](#), Broadside, (1773) [American Memory](#). Click on thumbnail of broadside to see larger version.
- [George Robert Twelve Hewes, “A Shoemaker and the Tea Party,”](#) on [History Matters](#).

Group D. Sources: Choosing Sides and Taking Risks

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Questions for this group to consider: What were different reasons to support or oppose non-importation? How do different interests end up on different sides of the conflict?

- [George Washington to George Mason](#), letter (1769) on [American Memory](#).
- [Catherine Rathell, Choosing the Revolution, a Day in the Life](#), a link on [Digital History](#).
- [Joseph Galloway’s Speech to the Continental Congress](#), September 28, 1774, on [American Memory](#).
- [William Reynolds, Choosing the Revolution, A Day in the Life](#), a link on [Digital History](#).